



## COMMISSION ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

### Montgomery County Health and Human Services (HHS) FY 11 HHS Budget Forum Testimony October 20, 2009

Bill Gray, Chair | Jonathan Walker, Vice Chair

As the newest HHS Commission, we appreciate the opportunity to share with you some of our top priorities for the upcoming year. We recognize that the County is in a severe budget crisis but we ask that you protect those in need and vulnerable in our community and also to provide or coordinate with the Veterans Health Administration for critically needed mental health services for persons with mental health and substance abuse problems. Of course we urge you to take advantage of any and all federally funded programs by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

We have just learned, that pending all approvals, the Silver Spring Veterans Center is moving to a new and much larger location in an office building across from NOAA on Colesville Road in April, 2010 very near the Silver Spring Transit Center. What we still need are service organization benefit claims counselors and medical treatment to be provided in Montgomery County. We need the County's assistance for the following:

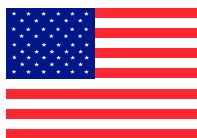
- We recommend that the County work with the Veterans Health Administration to establish a **Community Based Outreach Clinic (CBOC) in the County** to provide medical and psychiatric care for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Traumatic Brain Injury, the most prevalent mental/behavioral health disorders among service members returning from overseas deployment in the community, not just the VA hospitals. This CBOC would also provide same services and coordinate the care with the VA through screening. Hopefully, this CBOC would include a full time "Service Organization" benefits claims counselor. In Maryland, there are currently CBOC's located in Baltimore, Cambridge, Charlotte Hall, Cumberland, Fort Howard, Glen Burnie, Greenbelt, Hagerstown and Pocomoke.
- The new out processing procedures catch the majority of PTSD cases but not all of them as PTSD can be delayed and triggered by reintegration/life stressors. Nobody likes to admit they have a problem and most deny it until they are forced to face it by their families or the courts. We should make it clear that any County resources for programming supplement, not replace, already available VA programs.
- There needs to be more programs and support groups for women in the military, spouses and their children. According to the Troops and Family Care Fund Feasibility Study published by the Montgomery County Community Foundation 30% of women serving in the military have experienced sexual assault. There are financial implications of serving in the military and families have been severely impacted. Divorce rates in the active military have tripled and child abuse is up 30%.
- In regards to poverty, there are homeless veterans and other veterans and their family members who may be eligible for benefits. Sadly, 95% of all homeless vets have been incarcerated at one time in their life. 5.7% percent of veterans were living in poverty, compared to 12 % of non-veterans as of 2007 according to the American Community Survey.
- The Commission members and other volunteers could volunteer to provide peer counseling and facilitate workshops for veterans and their spouses and children. Workshops might be conducted on

finances, VA Home Loan Program, couple relationships, child raising tips, nutrition, wellness and health to name a few.

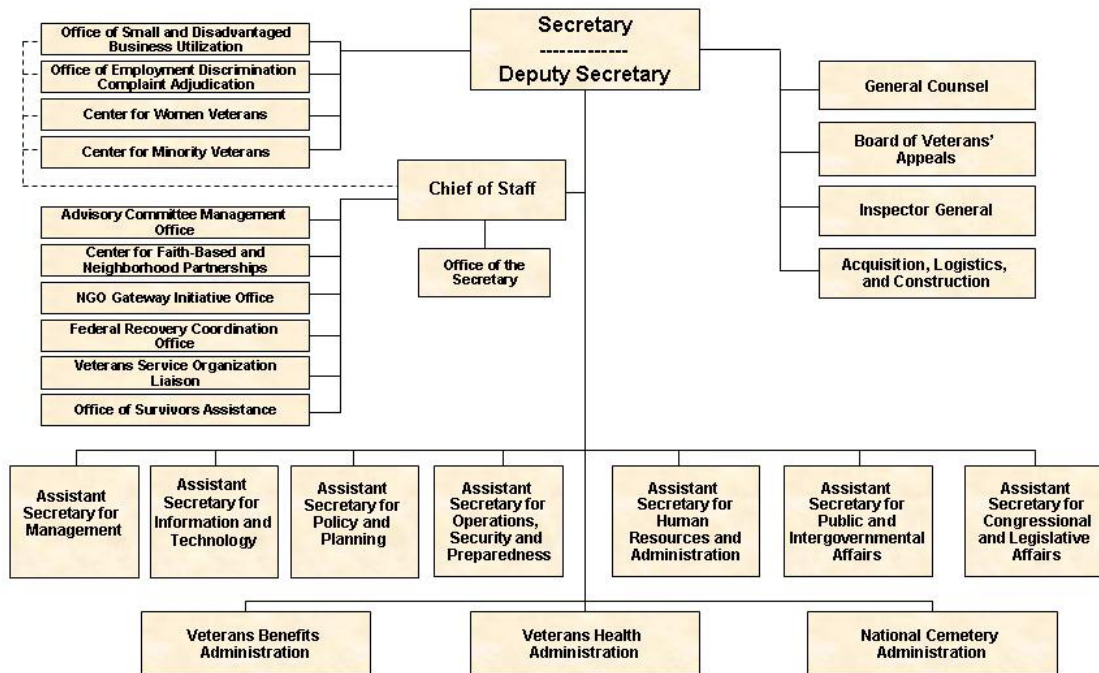
- The Silver Spring Vet Center administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs provides male and female non-medical services (Individual and Group counseling) to returning veterans from Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom and other Theater Veterans and their families during non-traditional hours (evenings). Plus they do bereavement counseling for the families (all hours), outreach, PTSD, sexual trauma, substance abuse, family/marital, homeless, woman veterans and benefits, employment, and medical referrals to appropriate services for the Veteran (VA and non VA). A benefits specialist from the American Legion and a Disabled Veterans Outreach Program from the Montgomery County Employment Services comes to their office to meet with veterans once a week.
- The County should increase efforts to work with those who can provide housing for the homeless and released incarcerated veterans.
- The County work to help establish a Veterans Court program in Montgomery County, MD. This type of court rehabilitates Veterans in place of incarceration and the County can look to Erie, New York for program guidelines.
- Identify upfront during any County departmental intake process if the individual or any immediate family member ever served in the U.S. Armed Forces, National Guard or Reserves, so that they all can be assessed for state and federal programs that they may be eligible for such as respite care for families with children who have developmental disabilities, or home care for veterans who are seniors. Uma Ahluwalia, Director, HHS has already agreed to do this and we thank her for that.
- We will be working with Corrections and Police and other identified departments to do the same. We recommend that the Office of Human Resources work with MCGEO and other County unions to identify employees who are veterans and/or family members of veterans or County employees who are on active duty, and offer support to them.
- We encourage the County to ask all contractors and grantees to collect this same information in the intake process and supply this data to the County.
- Require all departments to apply for federal grants/seek out partnerships with the private and non-profit sector that would benefit Veterans and their spouses and children.
- We ask that the County continue to work to build partnerships between the military helping networks and community based non-profits.
- Recognize Veterans as a constituency in County public relations, outreach efforts, employment, and mission statements. We ask that the Office of Human Resources revise their Veterans Preference policy for hiring to create more job opportunities and be more in line with the Federal Government
- Develop an Annual Veterans Recognition Plan in partnership with our Commission which has short term and long term outcomes, and in particular plan to honor those soldiers who have made the ultimate sacrifice with input from their family members. This would include Memorial Day and Veterans Day programs to honor families, and County events that provide free passes to Veterans and family members.

We appreciate the opportunity to advise you on these issues which we feel will help our Veterans in the County. We hope that the County will continue its legacy of being a responsive and accountable government. Thank you.

*“Veterans helping Veterans”*



# DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



\_\_\_\_\_ Direct Report

----- Coordination

June 2009